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Agriculture and Industry

Iowa's rich black soil, invigorating climate, and abundant rainfall combine to make the Hawkeye State a veritable Garden of Eden. Frequently referred to as the "Breadbasket of the Nation," Iowa ranks first in the production of corn, oats, hay, and popcorn — its grain constituting 13 per cent of the total produced in the United States. Iowa also ranks first in hogs, finished cattle for market, and poultry. In dairying the state has long vied with Minnesota and Wisconsin for leadership. Iowa's high rank in the Nation's agriculture is revealed graphically by 1940 census figures showing the state scored 24 firsts, 10 seconds, and 6 thirds among the states in those important phases of agriculture characteristic of the great grain and meat producing areas of the United States.

This fabulous productivity is all the more amazing when one remembers that Iowa embraces only 2 per cent of the Nation's area. Fortunately, 25 per cent of the Grade A land in the United States is contained within her borders. It has taken more than soil, climate, and rainfall, however, to give Iowa her dominant position in agriculture. It has taken industrious, self-reliant, and resourceful farmers, encouraged by inspired and intelligent

leaders, to maintain this supremacy for half a century. Little wonder that Sidney Foster should declare: "In all that is good, Iowa affords the best."

Since agriculture is the hub of Iowa's economic life it is important to note a few of the men in this field who have helped build the Hawkeye State. For many of the great institutions and inventions which we enjoy today spring from the dreams of a single man, or at least a small group of men, who have banded together to achieve their objective. And, although individualism has formed a dominant thread in the story, the desire to share and improve the lot of their neighbors and friends is equally noteworthy.

Iowans are justly proud of their famous Waterloo Dairy Cattle Congress. Thousands attend this colorful event each year: only the Iowa State Fair eclipses it in total paid attendance. And yet, very few Iowans can recall the man who, at one bold stroke, brought fame to himself and fortune to his fellow dairymen. I refer to John Stewart — a name that should be known to all Iowans.

John Stewart was born in Ohio in 1836. He served in the Union Army throughout the Civil War, moving to St. Louis in 1866 to become a jobber in butter, cheese, and farm produce. The work must have appealed to him, for in 1867 he engaged in the same business at Galena. Moving to Manchester in 1870, Stewart started a creamery a few miles east of that thriving little community in 1872.

His Spring Branch Creamery is said to have been the first butter creamery in Iowa.

At that time eastern dairymen held western dairy products in low repute; they not only scoffed at the poor breeding of Iowa cattle but they questioned the ability and honesty of all western dairymen. Such a situation must have seemed intolerable to a man of John Stewart's character. Having won prizes on his butter at St. Louis, he determined to compete at the International Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876. The chances of this obscure Iowan against the finest buttermakers of Europe and America must have seemed exceedingly slim, but when the judges awarded the gold medal for the "best package of Butter exhibited" it went to John Stewart. This honor is said to have removed much of the prejudice against Iowa butter and was calculated to have added from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 annually to the income of her dairymen.

Encouraged by this phenomenal success, sixty-six dairymen convened at Manchester on February 2, 1877, and organized the "Northern Iowa Butter and Cheese Association." John Stewart was naturally elected president. In 1882 the name of the association was changed to "The Iowa Butter and Cheese Association." At the fifteenth annual meeting held at Waverly in 1891, the dairymen reorganized and adopted the name "Iowa State Dairy Association."

Between 1892 and 1909 the Iowa State Dairy Association held meetings in ten different towns — Cedar Rapids and Waterloo each acting four times as host during this period. In 1908 E. R. Shoemaker of Waterloo, discouraged at the small number of dairymen present to hear the highly professional papers, suggested the advantage of an exhibit of the best dairy cattle to revive interest and help Iowa keep pace with the leading dairy states. President W. B. Barney proposed holding a dairy cow exhibition in conjunction with their regular meeting at Cedar Rapids in 1909. Professor Hugh G. Van Pelt of Iowa State College was selected as the general manager of the convention's first cattle show. Waterloo became the site of the 1910 meeting and has entertained it ever since, building the show in typical Waterloo fashion into an exhibition of national and international importance. Thus, the personal triumph of John Stewart at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 is a landmark in Iowa dairying and a steppingstone to the Nation's greatest dairy show.

One might multiply the exploits of such men as John Stewart a hundredfold in the story of Iowa agriculture. The founders of the Iowa State Fair at Fairfield in 1854 would be amazed at the magnitude of their dream child a century later. The Clay County Fair stands as a monument to the vision, courage, industry, and resourcefulness of

the citizens of Spencer, who would settle for nothing less than the "World's Greatest County Fair." The names of James M. and Dante M. Pierce, Edwin T. Meredith, and the three Henry Wallaces are linked with such outstanding agricultural journals as *The Iowa Homestead*, *Successful Farming*, and *Wallaces' Farmer*. These men were giants in American as well as in Iowa agricultural journalism.

A few more illustrations will suffice. In 1852 Timothy Day, a Van Buren County farmer, imported the first three blooded cattle into Iowa. Day appalled his neighbors when he paid \$100 for a Shorthorn bull and \$125 for two heifers. The Singmasters of Keota and the Holbrooks of Greeley have recorded their names imperishably in the breeding of powerful draft farm horses. Through his two great trotters — Axtell and Allerton — Charles W. Williams made Independence the "Lexington of the North," holding half the world's trotting and pacing records on his famous kite track in 1891.

A. J. Goddard of Fort Atkinson was the most important corn breeder between 1870 and 1900. Such men as P. G. Holden and Henry A. Wallace did outstanding work with hybrid corn in the twentieth century. The work of J. L. Budd in developing hardy fruits is typical of the numerous contributions made by the faculty of Iowa State College for the advancement of agriculture. The

phenomenal growth of the turkey industry during the past quarter century can be associated with the name of A. C. Gingerich, whose Maplecrest Turkeys — a delicious Iowa product — can be found on the menus of the *Queen Mary* and the Waldorf-Astoria. Little wonder that presidents of the United States should inevitably look to Iowa for their Secretaries of Agriculture. "Tama Jim" Wilson held this important post for sixteen years under three presidents, the longest period a cabinet post has ever been held by one man.

Agriculture in Iowa is more than an occupation; it is a mode of life. Agriculture is more than a dull job to be carried on by some country hayseed; it is a profession, a highly skilled one, requiring a good business head and plenty of capital. In this day of scientific farming it takes more than black soil and a favorable climate to achieve success as a farmer. It takes intelligence, broad knowledge, and sound judgment. It definitely is no place for the amateur — as highly trained professional men in other fields have found to their sorrow. The men who operate the 212,000 farms in Iowa that produce fully two billion dollars in wealth annually have brought a good living to themselves and the satisfaction that comes with seeing a job well done.

The production of \$2,000,000,000 annually in agricultural income stands in sharp contrast to the \$15,000,000 paid by Thomas Jefferson when he

consummated the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Even before inflation struck the Nation, the value of farm lands and buildings in the smallest county in Iowa exceeded the total cost of the Louisiana Purchase. Since Iowa and the Nation will be observing the 150th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase in 1953, a similar comparison can be made with the industrial output of the Hawkeye State. In making this comparison one need not choose such large industrial centers as Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, or Waterloo. The little town of Newton in Jasper County affords an excellent example.

In 1947 Newton ranked eighth among the cities of Iowa in the value added by manufacturing — \$18,788,000. A half century before, in 1893, Newton was a sleepy little county seat town of about 2,500 souls. It might have remained so to this day, much as Marengo or Montezuma have done, had not Fred Louis Maytag decreed otherwise.

Born in Elgin, Illinois, in 1857, Frederick L. Maytag came to Iowa as a lad. He worked on his father's farm and attended country school at intervals. In 1880 he became a clerk in a Newton implement store. The following year he purchased a part interest in the store; the firm operated under the name of Maytag and Bergman until 1890, when Maytag sold his interest and bought a lumber yard. The stage was now set for an enterprise

which was later organized as The Maytag Company. When it was originally set up in 1893, however, it bore the name of Parsons Band Cutter and Self-Feeder Company.

The growth of the Maytag Company is one of the most phenomenal stories in Iowa history. During the Panic of 1893 the assets of the future Maytag Company were: "Four ambitious men; a workable idea; \$2,400 in capital; an abundant fund of confidence in the future of America." At that time Fred L. Maytag served as the secretary. For a time the company manufactured machinery for the farmer; in 1907 it started to help the farmer's wife by bringing out the first Maytag washer. Forty years later the Maytag Company was recognized as the largest manufacturer of domestic laundry equipment in the world.

There are many landmarks in this fabulous story, both in the invention and production of washing machines between 1907 and 1947. In 1922 the "Gyrafoam" principle was invented, and production stepped up almost miraculously; in less than two years the Maytag Company spurted to a position of world leadership in washer production. Soon a solid trainload of Maytag washers was being shipped to a single eastern city; by 1926 a similar trainload was being sent to a western city. According to the company records: "In May, 1927, the factory dispatched the largest single shipment of merchandise (to that time) ever made

of any kind — eight solid trainloads of Gyrafoam washers, valued at two and three-quarter million dollars.”

In the years that followed, the popularity of the Maytag washer was attested by the continued public demand for it. The four millionth washer was completed in 1941. At that time the company geared itself for World War II. In 1944 the three thousand Maytag employees produced \$13,000,000 in war materials. After 1945 the company returned to normalcy, producing its five millionth washer during 1947. Two years later, in 1949, the six millionth Maytag washer rolled from the assembly line. Frederick Louis Maytag, the driving genius of this outstanding Iowa industry and the man who gave his name to it, was the first to recognize the loyalty, skill, and wholehearted cooperation of the men who surrounded him in this fabulous enterprise. Happily, he was able to pass the management on to his son, Elmer Henry Maytag, who in turn transmitted it to his son, Frederick Maytag II, who has held the office of president since 1940. It is not often that an industry or institution can point to three generations of eminent leadership.

The Maytag Company is but a single example of many outstanding Iowa industries that have attained national prominence through the organizing genius and energy of their founders and builders. The mere mention of such items as pearl

buttons, fountain pens, rolled oats, shampoo, sash, doors, and blinds should readily bring to the loyal Iowan's mind the builders of these great enterprises.

It should be obvious that the industrial history of Iowa is just as colorful and significant as the state's agricultural story. Furthermore, the type of Iowa industry has been largely determined by our agricultural economy. Thus, if livestock forms the hub of Iowa agriculture, meat packing has stood for years at the forefront of the state's industries. Between 1914 and 1929 Iowa jumped from tenth to fourth as a meat-packing state, and it has held this position ever since. Such names as Morrell and Rath are illustrative of the stellar role the home-owned companies have played in this phenomenal story of meat packing.

Butter and cheese production stand second in importance to meat packing in Iowa manufacturing. The name of John Stewart has already been discussed in this story. A few years ago the writer saw a huge truck from Monroe, Wisconsin, roll up to the Swiss cheese factory at Kalona and pick up huge 200-pound wheels of Swiss cheese. Iowa, apparently, was making a substantial contribution to the pre-eminence of her sister dairy state across the Mississippi. The story of the Twin-County Cooperative Dairies in Kalona is but one of scores of ventures that have done much to make butter and cheese making outstanding in Iowa today.

Woodworking is still one of the great Iowa industries in our Mississippi towns. Most of these giant enterprises were established before 1900, when millions of feet of logs and lumber were being floated down the Mississippi from Wisconsin and Minnesota. The numerous sawmills that sprang up along the Mississippi were responsible for transforming the log cabins and sod houses of Iowa's frontier into the comfortable frame homes of a later generation. This lumber was also a prime factor in helping keep Iowa railroads solvent in pioneer days. Today such firms as Carr, Adams, & Collier and Farley & Loetscher of Dubuque, the Curtis Company of Clinton, the Huttig and the Musser companies at Muscatine, and the Leopold Desk Company at Burlington still manufacture wood products that are shipped to the four corners of the Nation.

In the past, some of these builders of Iowa's agricultural and industrial economy have received considerable recognition; others have been almost completely neglected. In a few instances, company histories have been produced, Maytag and Morrell being excellent examples. During the past three decades the State Historical Society has tilled the ground whenever possible, but up to the present only the surface has been scratched. Fuller recognition must ultimately come to these "Builders of the Hawkeye State" who have affected the lives of thousands of Iowans.

It is heartening to note that others are recognizing the contributions of our notable Iowans. On January 5, 1952, Lane K. Newberry, a native Iowan who is now a Chicago advertising executive, presented his series of historical paintings on "One Moment in History" that started three famous Iowans on different careers. Unveiled before a large audience in the Fort Madison Public Library, the series portrayed life in Davis, Cedar, and Black Hawk counties in the 1880's when Walter A. Sheaffer, Herbert C. Hoover, and Ralph Budd were young. Included in the series were scenes of West Branch, where Herbert Hoover was born, and the Waterloo area, birthplace of Ralph Budd, former president of the Burlington Railroad. Most of the paintings depicted scenes from Bloomfield where Walter A. Sheaffer, the founder of the Sheaffer Pen Company, was born and began his unique merchandising career.

Truly, agriculture and industry, as well as education and religion, have played a vital role in the story of Iowa. And it was these pioneers of yesteryear who helped build the Hawkeye State into the mighty commonwealth it is today.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN